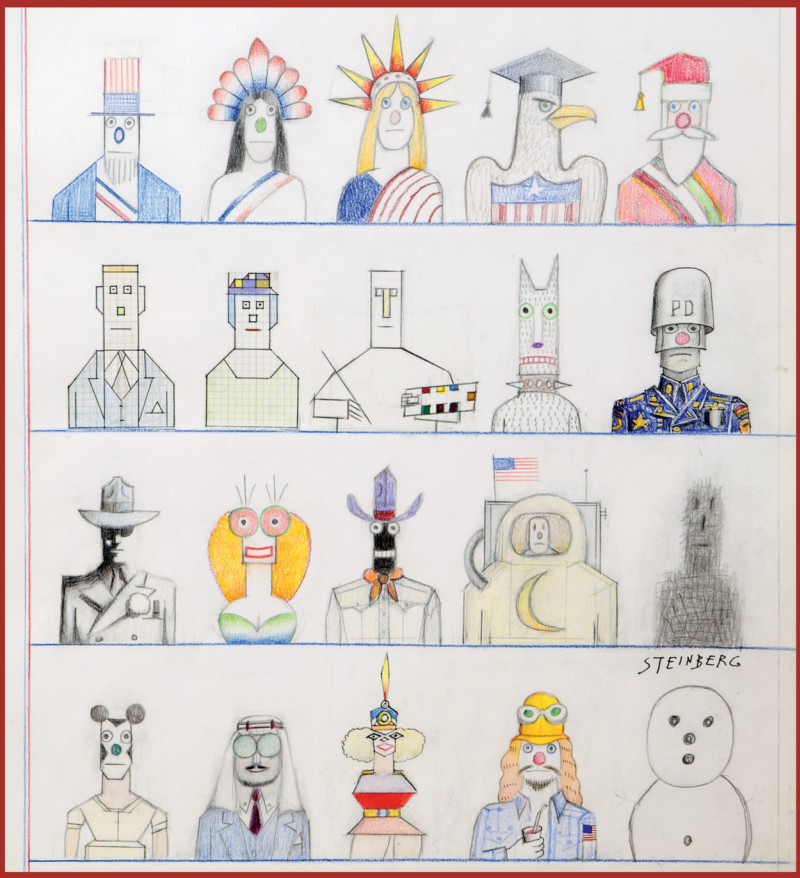
Jonathan Greenberg



The Cambridge **Introduction** to Satire

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In satire, evil, folly, and weakness are held up to ridicule – to the delight of some and the outrage of others. Satire may claim the higher purpose of social critique or moral reform, or it may simply revel in its own transgressive laughter. It exposes frauds, debunks ideals, binds communities, starts arguments, and evokes unconscious fantasies. It has been a central literary genre since ancient times, and has become especially popular and provocative in recent decades. This new introduction to satire takes a historically expansive and theoretically eclectic approach, addressing a range of satirical forms from classical, Renaissance, and Enlightenment texts through contemporary literary fiction, film, television, and digital media. The beginner in need of a clear, readable overview and the scholar seeking to broaden and deepen existing knowledge will both find this a lively, engaging, and reliable guide to satire, its history, and its continuing relevance in the world.

Jonathan Greenberg is Professor of English and Department Chair at Montclair State University and was awarded the Andrew J. Kappel Prize for Literary Criticism in 2007. He is the author of *Modernism, Satire and the Novel* (2012), a Choice Outstanding Academic Title. With Nathan Waddell he co-edited *Brave New World: Contexts and Legacies* (2016). He has also won an Emmy Award for his writing on the classic Nickelodeon cartoon series, Rugrats.

The Cambridge Introduction to Satire

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107030183
DOI: 10.1017/9781139343251

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First published 2019

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-107-03018-3 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-68205-4 Paperback

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For Megan

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Abbreviations

For scholarly works from which I quote frequently, I cite the following editions parenthetically using abbreviations and page numbers.

For primary works from which I quote frequently, I use parenthetical references. In most of these cases, parenthetical references indicate page numbers; in other cases, I specify whether they refer to volumes, chapters, cantos, or lines. A list of frequently cited primary works can be found at the back of the book along with a list of films cited.

AC	Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957.
AS	Highet, Gilbert. *The Anatomy of Satire.* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1962.
CS	Quintero, Ruben, ed. *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.
DI	Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981.
DSM	Fredric V. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001.
FS	Paulson, Ronald. *The Fictions of Satire.* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967.
LS	Knight, Charles. *The Literature of Satire.* New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
PDP	Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Caryl Emerson, trans. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
PS	Elliott, Robert C. *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art.* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1962.
PSE	Ashley Marshall. *The Practice of Satire in England, 1658–1770.* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

RHW	Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Helene Iswolsky trans. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984.
SCR	Griffin, Dustin. *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction.* Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1994.
SI	Seidel, Michael. *Satiric Inheritance: Rabelais to Sterne*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979.
SNEE	Paulson, Ronald. *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967.
SSA	Test, George. *Satire: Spirit and Art.* Tampa, University of South Florida Press, 1991.
STG	Guilhamet, Leon. *Satire and the Transformation of Genre*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987.

The Structure of this Book

This effort at introducing the topic of satire is organized into three large sections. Part I has two chapters. Chapter 1 lays out some basic ideas of what satire is, how it works, and how the understanding of satire among literary critics has evolved. Chapter 2 discusses related terminology in an attempt to familiarize students with frequently used critical categories such as comedy, irony, and parody, and how they have been distinguished from satire. Together, these two chapters aim to offer a serviceable stand-alone introduction to the topic.

Part II commences a historical survey of literary satire, looking at what might be called the traditional canon, though I have sought to expand this canon with texts rediscovered in the last few decades and to update understandings of it with the insights of recent scholarship. Since I view genres as subject to the forces of history, I use both period and genre as organizing principles in an account that is neither strictly chronological nor strictly genre-based. In each chapter I offer an overview followed by a series of readings. While intensive close-reading is not possible due to considerations of space, I do aim for what might be called a "middle-distance-reading" that covers a range of texts but with enough detail and nuance to help readers launch their own sustained analyses. Chapter 3 surveys classical satire, focusing on Athenian Old Comedy, Roman verse satire, and ancient Menippean satire. Chapter 4 examines the Renaissance and early modern period across genres, looking at prose, poetry, and drama. Chapter 5 looks at varieties of prose satire in the Enlightenment, while Chapter 6 covers verse satire in the same historical era, but extends its account through the Romantic era, and glances at some modern examples.

Part III focuses on satire roughly from the mid-eighteenth century to the present, satire that is too often ignored in introductory texts like this. A brief transition frames the critical issues surrounding satire and the novel, and satiric novels are the focus of Chapters 7, 8, and 9. Rather than offer a single chronology of novelistic satire, I identify three different kinds of satiric novel, and provide a historical account of each one. As in the earlier periods,

I assume that formal or generic questions intersect with historical ones. Because introductory courses are likely to vary widely in the novels that they read, I generally treat a greater number of texts in these chapters through shorter readings. Chapter 10 then takes a broad look at satire in popular culture, analyzing satire in a wide variety of forms including journalism, cartoons, light verse, songs, cinema, and television. An epilogue examines the 2015 murders of the French satirists who worked at the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, and the questions posed by their satire and the public discussion about it.

I should say a few words about my selection of texts. For the most part, I have limited my focus to the English-language tradition I know best. However, in the earlier periods a few key texts – *Gargantua and Pantagruel, Don Quixote, Candide*, and of course the seminal classical authors – are simply too important, and too much in conversation with Anglophone works, to ignore. In the later sections, I occasionally nod to well-known or otherwise significant non-English texts as appropriate. A book like this can always include more, and none of the generous colleagues who read drafts of this work failed to make valuable suggestions of material to add. I hope that as readers draw up their own lists of satires that deserve more critical attention, the analysis I offer here will be of some value.

Acknowledgments

Ray Ryan of Cambridge University Press first suggested that I undertake this book. I am grateful for his belief in me and in the book, for his advice and support, and for his willingness to allow this project the time it demanded. Nicholas Nace read the entire manuscript – much of it more than once – and offered brilliant and detailed commentary throughout, improving it immeasurably. I doubt there is a scholar of his generation as deeply or as widely read in the field of satire. Naomi Liebler provided crucial help on early modern satire and even more crucial pep-talks at various stages along the way. Many other friends and colleagues lent their expertise by reading and commenting on individual chapters: Joe Ansolabehere, Lee Behlman, David Galef, Keith Leslie Johnson, Naomi Liebler (again), David Sedley, Miranda Sherwin, Art Simon, and Robert Weisbuch. On certain specialized questions I consulted Oscar Alcantara, Jessica Burstein, Maria DiBattista, Jeff Gonzalez, David Greenberg, Judith Greenberg, Faye Hammill, Jeff Miller, and Adam Rzepka. And David Currell, Maria DiBattista (again), and Simon Dickie shared unpublished work that helped me to think through questions about satire and the epic, Anita Loos, and picaresque fiction. My graduate assistants Janine Butler and Dayna Arcurio helped with the initial proposal for this book; a few years later, the irreplaceable Giana Milazzo contributed smart, thorough, lucid research that must have saved me hundreds of hours of work. The New York Public Library provided research space and support; at Montclair State University, the entire staff of Sprague Library, particularly those helping with interlibrary loans, deserves special mention. A sabbatical granted by Montclair State University allowed me time to complete this book, and Dean Robert Friedman of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences provided assistance for some key expenses.

My parents, Robert and Maida Greenberg, continue to be an inexhaustible source of love and support. My children, Hank and Maggie, enrich my life every day; in them, I am happy to say, the satiric spirit runs strong. Above all, Megan Blumenreich has been a kind, patient, generous, wise, loving, funny, and utterly invaluable companion through the disquietingly long time it has taken to complete this work. I can't thank her enough.

Part I

Chapter 1

What Is Satire?

Satire: a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured.

— Dr. Samuel Johnson[1]

Satire: the act of being a wise-ass and saying it's for a higher purpose.

— *The Onion Book of Known Knowledge*[2]

Three Episodes

Sometime in the summer of 1674, John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, driven by a malice born of sexual rejection and betrayal, hatched a hasty plan to destroy the friendship of three noblewomen. He visited an old crone reputed for her magical powers, a character straight out of *Macbeth*, and, in exchange for the promise of enshrining her name forever in his poetry, secured from her a magical gift, an enormous dildo "long and large as Hector's lance" (83.81). Hastening to the resort town of Bath, Rochester presented the oversized sex toy to the three women, with instructions that it should be given "to the Lady most deserving" (83.87), setting off a bitter feud among them. A truce was attained only with the intervention of a clergyman – and then, apparently, only after he himself had sex with all three women.

Such is the raunchy parody of the *Iliad*'s "Judgment of Paris" as told in heroic couplets by a Restoration-era poet, most likely Rochester himself.[3] An early example of the mock-epic form, the untitled 154-line poem was, according to the scholar Harold Love, probably written as "an act of revenge" in an ongoing feud between Rochester's lover, the Duchess of Portsmouth, and Queen Catherine, whose partisans are depicted as insatiable sex fiends; a handwritten copy of the poem may have been delivered to the women along with an actual dildo. This playful take on the erotic practices, real or imagined, of the Carolean court depends upon an old trope: the "tradition of misogynistic dildo" poems goes back at least to the first or second century CE. But Rochester executes the joke deftly, and his opening pair of questions –

> Say Heav'n-born Muse, for only thou canst tell,
> How discord dire, between two Widows fell?
> What made the Fair one, and her well-shaped Mother,
> Duty forget and pious Nature smother? (81.1–4)

– likely served as a model for Alexander Pope in his famous poem *The Rape of the Lock*.[4] Rochester's poem certainly shares with Pope's mock epic a fusion of classical parody and thinly veiled references to contemporary acquaintances.

Throughout his short career, Rochester's combination of racy material and verbal dexterity, along with his personal reputation as a rake, won him great recognition, and Andrew Marvell is reported to have called him the leading satirist of his age.[5] But Rochester's penchant for provocation also got him into trouble. The young courtier turned his wit on the king himself, depicting, in another poem, a sovereign in thrall to his sexual cravings:

> For princes' pricks, like to buffoons at court,
> Do govern us, because they make us sport.
> His was the sauciest that e'er did swive,
> The proudest, peremptory prick alive:
> Though safety, religion, life lay on't,
> 'Twould break through all to make its way to c – t. (86.A14–19)

As a court poet of the Restoration, Rochester did not publish most of his work through the printing press. His poems were copied longhand and intended to be read aloud at court to an audience that was happy or at least willing to be scandalized, provoked, or insulted.[6] Unfortunately, however, during a party, Rochester – perhaps driven by some self-destructive impulse, perhaps simply drunk – mistakenly placed a copy of this poem in the king's pocket. According to one account (a scenario that could easily belong to a tired sitcom), the king had asked to see a different poem and Rochester confused the two manuscripts. Although the king was known for his good-humored indulgence of the earl's antics, this time the attacks, according to one contemporary observer, "touch[ed] too severely upon the King,"[7] dangerously equating political and sexual misrule. In the face of Charles's wrath, or perhaps that of his offended mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth, Rochester was forced to flee the royal court.[8]

On Valentine's Day, 1989, the Booker and Whitbread Prize-winning novelist Salman Rushdie was sentenced to death by Iran's spiritual leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, for having written a novel that included among its several storylines a fictional speculation on the life of Muhammad. The novel's title, *The Satanic Verses*, refers specifically to a tale from the

"collections of *hadith* or traditions about the life of the Prophet" in which Muhammad, or as Rushdie calls him, Mahound, initially recited certain Qu'ranic verses that accepted the legitimacy of three rival goddesses of Allah, but later recanted these same verses when he recognized them to have been inspired by the devil, Shaitan.[9] As depicted in Rushdie's novel, Mahound's decision is largely a political calculation made to secure an alliance with local non-Muslim authorities. The prophet urges his disciples to accept the three pagan goddesses as a pragmatic concession that will further the growth of his upstart faith:

> You all know what has been happening. Our failure to win converts. The people will not give up their gods . . . Angels and devils . . . Shaitan and Gibreel. We all, already, accept their existence, halfway between God and man. Abu Simbel asks that we admit just three more to this great company. Just three, and, he indicates, all Jahilia's souls will be ours.[10]

The novel had originated during Rushdie's undergraduate years at King's College, Cambridge, where, inspired by his own father's speculations on the historicity of the Qu'ran, he delved into Arabic and Western scholarship about the life of the prophet; twenty years later his research gave rise to an exuberant, multilayered, and fantastical work of fiction that offended the devout in many ways. In addition to its speculations on the composition of the satanic verses, the novel represents a scribe named Salman the Persian taking creative license in writing down the prophet's recitation, the prostitutes of Mecca playfully adopting the names of Muhammad's twelve wives, and a malignant, turbaned, and Khomeini-esque imam living in exile in Kensington while plotting a return home.

In all likelihood, neither Khomeini nor those who backed his *fatwa* had actually read Rushdie's book, but their condemnations spurred demonstrations, riots, and violence worldwide, including the murder of the novel's Japanese translator, and the near-murder of its Norwegian publisher and its Italian translator. Bookstores were firebombed, paperback publication delayed, political debate unleashed. Writers ranging from Jacques Derrida to Bob Woodward to Nuruddin Farah defended Rushdie's right to free speech and the artistic value of his novel; many upheld what Rushdie later called the great "antireligious literary tradition of Boccaccio, Chaucer, Rabelais, Aretino and Balzac."[11] Yet indignant moralists on both the left (Jimmy Carter, John le Carré) and the right (Kingsley Amis, George Steiner) blamed the victim, scolding Rushdie for exercising his artistic and political freedom in a provocative and offensive manner. Rushdie went into hiding for over a decade as the British government worked to have the edict lifted, and only

in 2000 was he permitted to relinquish his security detail in the UK. The death threat remains in effect today; state-run Iranian media have recently raised the bounty.

In November 2012, Pete Wells, a *New York Times* restaurant critic, reviewed a new Times Square restaurant called Guy's American Kitchen & Bar, owned and run by Guy Fieri, a popular television chef with platinum-bleached hair, a furry brown goatee, and copious tattooing who had shot to fame after winning a Food Network reality show competition. Wells's review began, innocently but atypically for the genre, by posing questions directly to the restaurateur: "Guy Fieri, have you eaten at your new restaurant in Times Square? Have you pulled up one of the 500 seats at Guy's American Kitchen & Bar and ordered a meal? Did you eat the food? Did it live up to your expectations?"[12] But while the first paragraph displayed a mild insolence restrained by professional decorum, the second threw off any pretense of good manners as it inquired into the state of Fieri's "mind" and "soul":

> Did panic grip your soul as you stared into the whirling hypno wheel of the menu, where adjectives and nouns spin in a crazy vortex? When you saw the burger described as "Guy's Pat LaFrieda custom blend, all-natural Creekstone Farm Black Angus beef patty, LTOP (lettuce, tomato, onion + pickle), SMC (super-melty-cheese) and a slathering of Donkey Sauce on garlic-buttered brioche," did your mind touch the void for a minute?

And so the review continued, piling high the rhetorical questions, not only inquiring about the delinquent service and greasy food, but also skewering Fieri the author – attacking his language, the crazy, spinning "adjectives and nouns" of menus and marketing. At the same time Wells conjured comic-grotesque images of bodily functions that rendered the food wholly unappetizing: "When we hear the words Donkey Sauce," he asked, "which part of the donkey are we supposed to think about?"

Within two days, the review had gone viral on the Internet, reaching 45,000 Facebook shares. Fieri took to a morning television show to defend his restaurant and to accuse Wells of snobbery and self-promotion. Fellow TV personalities such as the drawling self-help therapist "Dr. Phil" joined the counter-attack while the *Times*'s public editor defended the scathing review. Pundits in print and digital media interpreted the conflict in all kinds of ways: as a culture war flare-up between the reviewer's blue-state elitism and the TV chef's red-state populism; as an emblem of a new digital media world in which "snark" and controversy are rewarded with clicks, hits, tweets, likes, and shares; as a case study in camp aesthetics in which an attack on a cynical

marketing ploy was largely misread as an attack on innocence; even as a sociocultural protest, "a giant fuck you to the whole food network celebrity chef culture."[13]

A bawdy Restoration poem, a multi-plot postcolonial novel, a snarky restaurant-review-turned-Internet-meme: what do they have in common? All three texts enact some judgment or attack – on the sexual habits of Charles II, on the authority of canonical interpretations of the Qu'ran, on the culinary skills of a popular TV chef. All the texts seem to refer to real-world, historical people, even when those people are disguised or somehow transmuted into fictional entities. All these judgments, moreover, rely upon transgression as well as aggression: Rochester insults the king with vulgar language; Rushdie violates both the religious stricture against questioning the divine authorship of the Qu'ran and the Western liberal one against maligning anyone's religious beliefs; Wells crosses lines of decency, fair play, or etiquette, exceeding what seems the proper evaluative function of a review.

Yet none of these writings is *merely* a work of aggression or transgression. They all shape their judgments into an artistic form and blend attack with entertainment. Rochester's satire on the king is as notable for its playful representation of the monarch's sex life as for any cogent political critique. As his invocation of medieval and Renaissance satirists suggests, Rushdie's story of the satanic verses is a rebellious but imaginative exploration of the nature of artistic and spiritual inspiration, and he sets his inquiry within a narrative structure that deliberately confuses present and past, natural and supernatural, consciousness and dream, reality and delusion. Wells's rant, in its own small way, explodes the genre of the restaurant review, and in its strict adherence to the interrogative mood it joins a tradition of literary forms like the villanelle or lipogram that force creativity upon the author through the imposition of arbitrary constraints.[14] The artistry produces pleasure, even laughter. Imagination and wit render the object of attack amusing or ridiculous.

Finally, all of these works provoke real-world controversy. They intervene in the world's business. The "incidents" surrounding these texts involve not only the writer and the apparent target, but also other readers, actual and notional. Even the episode about which we know the least – Rochester's accidental disclosure of his satire to King Charles – likely caused problems for the poet not merely because the king didn't like to be insulted, but because he didn't want the insulting poems to circulate at court. The Wells–Fieri fracas, by most measures a trivial event, merited time on a popular morning news show and commentary from the public editor of America's leading newspaper. The Rushdie controversy – if that word is strong enough to

describe it – remains, thirty years later, a major cultural and political reference point. The debate that surrounded it has come to represent a fundamental clash of values that, Rushdie has maintained, can now be seen as a prologue to the destruction of the Twin Towers, not to mention the terrorist killings that followed the publication of satirical cartoons in France's *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in 2015. In all these cases, something playful became serious.

Rochester's poems, Rushdie's novel, and Wells's review are all examples of satire. Whether this claim strikes you as obvious or tendentious may depend upon your own experience as a reader and a student of satire – what you think "satire" means. For some scholars, satire is primarily a historical *genre*, narrowly defined, that reached its heights of accomplishment during the early Roman Empire and Enlightenment-era Europe. As Harry Levin has written, "It is generally agreed that English satire enjoyed its heyday during the first half of the eighteenth century; it declined . . . with the emergence of mere sentimental and romantic touchstones."[15] For much of the last century, this idea of satire prevailed among literary critics, and for some good reasons. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the lyric emerged as the dominant form of poetry and the novel the dominant form of prose fiction. Few new works of literature today formally resemble the satires of eighteenth-century figures like Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, and those that do are often relegated to minor status as parodies, entertainments, or light humor. Yet Levin's description of a genre of literature that belongs mainly to the past bears little resemblance to what non-scholars usually mean when they talk about satire. In common usage, people apply the term to a vast range of literature and other kinds of cultural production – music, visual art, journalism, film, video, performance, even customs, rituals, and other activities – that they read, witness, and participate in regularly. Any analysis of satire that ignores this everyday usage of the word will exclude a huge body of material in which satiric attitudes and behaviors survive prominently and vitally in the present. In this wider conception, satire is often referred to as a *mode*, or even, for one recent critic, a *practice* (*PSE*).

In seeking to outline what satire is and has been, in the rest of this chapter I offer not a narrow definition of satire but a broad discussion. I begin with the "ordinary language" assumption that satire is *whatever it is that we call satire*. Common usage, in other words, should guide us more than the pedantic diktats of critics. I first address the distinctions between satire as genre, mode, and practice. I then describe the still-influential understanding of satire that coalesced in the 1950s and 1960s as morally purposive literature that deploys wit, irony, fantasy, and humor. But as literary studies have changed, this view has been challenged, and I therefore review the major arguments against that

old model. I fill out the analysis with examination of other features often associated with satire, and, finally, I discern some ways that satires can be described or grouped in order to help the reader find new lines of connection.

Genre, Mode, Practice

The first distinction to be made in analyzing satire is between satire as a *genre* and satire as a *mode* – or between the *form* and the *tone* of satire (*FS* 4). Throughout much of history, the word "satire" referred to a particular kind of *poem*. In his *Dictionary* of 1755, Samuel Johnson defined satire as a "poem in which wickedness or folly is censured." The ancient Roman poets who wrote satire and the eighteenth-century English writers who took those Roman poets as models used the term explicitly in the titles of their works. Even a later figure such as Thomas Hardy called his 1914 collection of poems *Satires of Circumstance.* Writers may have used different genre names to describe their poems – Horace's *sermones* or talks, Pope's epistles and essays – but the resemblances in form, style, content, and tone remain strong enough that scholars classify these poems as satires. These works constitute what George Test has called "a special kind of poetry," *formal verse satire* (*SSA* 10). Conventional wisdom holds that in English-language literature the years from John Dryden to Samuel Johnson – or, more liberally, from John Donne to Lord Byron – constitute the era in which formal verse satire attained its greatest cultural centrality and aesthetic achievement.

But in addition to formal verse satire, there exists a second genre of satire, one that has come to be called *Menippean satire,* after the Greek philosopher Menippus of the third century BCE, whose writings are lost but whose influence survives through the work of Marcus Terentius Varro and Lucian of Samosata. Although Menippean satire shares characteristics with verse satire, it is generally understood as a prose form, or a combination of prose and verse, marked by what the ancients called a "seriocomic" tone. Whereas Horace, Juvenal, and Persius are the major figures in Roman verse satire, the classical authors Varro, Lucian, Seneca, Petronius, and Apuleius exemplify the Menippean genre. Like formal verse satire, Menippean satire re-emerges forcefully in early modern Europe; some writers are famous for satires in both prose and verse. Menippean satire has generated its own body of scholarship and debate. Some argue for a wide definition, while others urge restraint, arguing that term has been abused.[16] Some claim that it should be considered discrete from formal verse satire, while others see the genres as overlapping. Some claim that it has been absorbed in modern times by the novel, while

a few insist that the novel and the Menippean satire must be considered separate genres. In almost all accounts, however, ancient and early modern Menippean satire is recognized as an important precursor to contemporary satiric fiction.

Even when satire is understood as a genre (or two), it is often understood as a genre that resists or complicates the very idea of genre. Satire combines, inhabits, or transforms other genres. It mixes subject matter, linguistic registers, and literary traditions. Satire, moreover, exists in ironic or secondary relation to "higher" genres, and it negates the authority of epic, saga, and myth (*SI* 63). Some critics go so far as to claim that the "appropriation of other forms is unique to satire and one of its chief identifying characteristics" (*STG* 13). Satire indeed often appears as a mock form: a mock epic, a mock encomium, a mockumentary. The word *mock* can mean either to imitate or to ridicule via imitation, and both of these connotations adhere to our understanding of satire as a genre that mocks other genres.

For most readers today, however, satire cannot be limited to these genres at all. Much drama is satiric. Whether or not the work of Aristophanes is best described as satire or comedy – scholars call it "Old Comedy" to distinguish it from the later phases of Greek comedy that focus more exclusively on domestic life – it possesses many satiric elements and has deeply influenced satirists ancient and modern. The plays of Ben Jonson and Molière offer early modern examples of satiric drama, and audiences have found satire in Oscar Wilde's comedies of manners, in the social critiques of Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw, in the ironic method and political purpose of Bertolt Brecht's "epic theater." And anyone who sees *The Book of Mormon* on stage, or *Last Week Tonight* on TV, or *Saturday Night Live* on her iPhone will recognize that satire applies meaningfully to a much broader range of culture, performance, and media than even the three major genres of literature. One way to widen our understanding of satire, then, would be to recognize, as I do in this book, the many satiric subgenres: city comedies, mock epics, picaresque novels, mockumentaries, modest proposals, and more.

To appreciate the full range of satiric literature, we need to consider satire not as a *genre* but as a *mode*. A mode, according to Alastair Fowler, is a looser sort of category than a genre, lacking the strong structural and formal markers of a genre but still sending "distinct signals" to a reader.[17] Because it is more nebulous than a genre, we often describe a mode with an adjective rather than a noun: *satiric* rather than *satire*. For Charles Knight, satire is "not a genre" but rather "pre-generic." It is "an exploiter of other genres," but also a "frame of mind," a "skeptical attitude towards life" (*LS* 4). In a previous book, I have called satire a "sensibility," since it implies a way of seeing the

world – something short of a fully worked-out philosophical position, but something more than a mere feeling or mood.[18]

But even the idea of satire as a mode has its problems: it can restrict criticism to the formal analysis of a text that is understood to be a self-contained artifact. If, like Ashley Marshall, however, we think of satire as a *practice*, we recognize it as an action or behavior that takes place in a specific historical context. The idea of satire as practice has not been explicitly theorized in the way that satire as a genre or mode has been, but many thinkers point the way to how it might be done. Drawing on speech-act theory, Linda Hutcheon says that "irony happens" – it requires a particular context of expectation and interpretation in order to be received as irony– and the same insight can be extended to satire.[19] Steven Jones notes that because satire is among the most "culturally embedded" kinds of literature, "to read satire" is always "to contextualize" it within specific historical parameters.[20] Drawing on theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Michael Warner, we might further recognize satire as an intervention in a public arena of discourse, an activity that brings people together (and pushes others away) to create a "public" or a dissenting "counterpublic."[21] Satire circulates through a culture, accruing new shades of meaning and eliciting new public responses. Finally, satire might be understood as an assertion of what Pierre Bourdieu called cultural capital. By distinguishing good from bad, satire distinguishes *us*: in delineating what we as writers or readers accept and reject, it positions us within a social "field" according to our tastes, judgments, and behaviors.[22]

Definition and Its Difficulties

Satire's ambiguous status as genre, mode, and practice already suggests some of the difficulty that besets any effort at defining it. Even the etymology of the word is duplicitous. It derives from the Latin *satura*, part of the phrase *lanx satura*, meaning a mixed platter of fruit or nuts. It presumably refers to the varied and miscellaneous nature of Roman verse satire. But in part due to a fourth-century work of criticism by the grammarian Diomedes, the word *satire* became confused with the Greek word *satyr*, and a kind of literature became associated with a Greek mythological creature and the ancient Greek "satyr plays" named for it. Rough, crude, and sexually aggressive, the satyr came to seem an apt figure for the rough, crude, and verbally aggressive satirist.[23] Although the false etymology was debunked by Isaac Casaubon in 1605, the erroneous association persisted because its assumptions about satiric aggression seemed logical, and early modern poets often called their verses "satyres."

But defining satire risks a greater danger than etymological confusion. It risks pedantry and irrelevance, and can become mired in fussy quibbling. It is therefore not surprising that, as Dustin Griffin observes, "since the 1960s there has been something of a retreat from large-scale theoretical claims about 'the nature of satire'" (*SCR* 31). Critics and students alike have put the definitional questions to one side and simply gone ahead with the work of analysis. After all, maybe not all satires in all periods and cultures work the same way or do the same things. Moreover, as Griffin points out, some of the most famous proclamations about satire tend to be quoted out of their original contexts and converted into rules and definitions, even though they originate as specific claims made in response to specific questions (*SCR* 37–39). Unwittingly, scholars fashion ironbound rules from casual or ironic remarks. For these reasons, a rigid definition of satire may be less useful than the description of a set of what Wittgenstein called "family resemblances." Kathryn Hume urges scholars to "conceptualize satire and the satiric as a family defined by a bundle of features. No single feature need be present, just a substantial number of them."[24] Such a policy gives up the goal of determining categories once and for all, and allows a flexible treatment attuned to the variety of works that appear to different readers as satire.

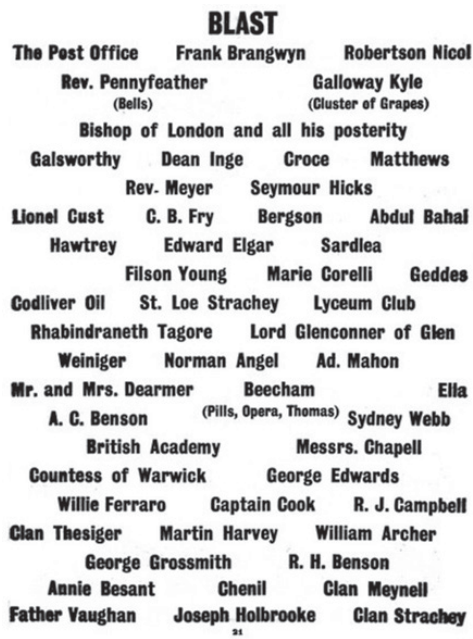
Yet even such a flexible approach requires some discernment of family traits. What are the notable family features of satire? Modern critics have generally begun with two basic criteria. In Northrop Frye's 1957 formulation, "Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard" (*AC* 224).[25] Minimally, satire requires a *fantasy* (specified as grotesque), and a *moral standard* (possibly implicit). But Frye's two-part model easily expands, so that George Test can distinguish four essential elements – *aggression, judgment, play, laughter* – with Test's first two criteria corresponding roughly to Frye's moral standard and the second two to Frye's grotesque fantasy (*SSA* 15). Another foundational theorist, Gilbert Highet, lists five elements – *topicality, exaggeration, shock, informality, dark or grotesque humor* – and then stipulates that the emotion evoked must be a "blend of amusement and contempt" (*AS* 21). Edward Rosenheim requires three elements: attack, "a manifest fiction," and reference to "historical particulars."[26] For Kathryn Hume, the list grows to a clunky and perhaps redundant nine: *attack, humor or wit, self-display, exaggeration, moral or existential truth, mockery, inquiry*, a *moral ideal*, and a *reformative aim*.[27] Clearly, these terms are heterogeneous, slippery, and prone to multiplication. How can we put them together?

The Canonical Model

An influential effort to form a coherent model of satire took place in the 1950s and 1960s. The work of several scholars – including Frye, Maynard Mack, Alvin Kernan, Robert C. Elliott, and Ronald Paulson – coalesced into a description of satire that I will call canonical. (It is sometimes referred to as "New Critical," but not all of its assumptions were New Critical.) The canonical model holds that satire is purposeful, "directed toward a preconceived end."[28] Satire's purpose is to exercise moral judgment. It condemns human failings, what Johnson called "wickedness or folly" ("knaves and fools"). It calls attention to individual or collective evil, and, explicitly or implicitly, urges the reader or viewer to participate in the censure of that evil. Satire therefore relies on the concepts of *laus et vituperatio,* praise and blame; by praising and blaming it neatly separates the world into good and bad. The British satirist Wyndham Lewis announced his aesthetic credo in the 1914 journal *Blast* with just this formulation, "blessing" and "blasting" those people, institutions, and phenomena that he liked and didn't like (*PS* 224) (Figure 1). And because issuing praise or blame – toward a person, a group, a practice – implies a norm against which that person, group, or practice is measured, even satire that appears wholly negative is thought to imply a higher standard of behavior. Likewise, a statement of praise can implicitly censure those who do not conform to the standard set by the object of praise (*STG* 21–22). As Ezra Pound put it, "Satire reminds one that certain things are not worth while."[29]

In addition to judging people against a moral norm, satire, according to the canonical model, requires a motive and a mechanism. Satire does not just identify vice and folly but aims to reform or punish them. Readers or viewers of satire discern vice or folly in others and are roused to indignation, brought into alliance with the satirist against a common target. Or if readers see themselves in the target of the satire, they are shamed into reform. Satire thus draws upon norms that are widely shared, and its meaning is fundamentally stable. The enforcement of stable moral norms makes satire culturally conservative, as the satirist speaks on behalf of age-old truths in the face of a decadent modern world. Satire is therefore a public mode or genre: it aims to apply its norms to a community, a nation, or even all of humanity.[30] The canonical model thus tends to locate satire in particular societies and time periods, particularly the eighteenth century. W.H. Auden sums up this old view: "Satire flourishes in a homogeneous society where satirist and audience share the same views as to how normal people can be expected to behave, and in times of relative stability and contentment."[31]

(a)


BLAST
The Post Office Frank Brangwyn Robertson Nicol
Rev. Pennyfeather (Bells) Galloway Kyle (Cluster of Grapes)
Bishop of London and all his posterity
Galsworthy Dean Inge Croce Matthews
Rev. Meyer Seymour Hicks
Lionel Cust C. B. Fry Bergson Abdul Bahai
Hawtrey Edward Elgar Sardlea
Filson Young Marie Corelli Geddes
Codliver Oil St. Loe Strachey Lyceum Club
Rhabindraneth Tagore Lord Glenconner of Glen
Weiniger Norman Angel Ad. Mahon
Mr. and Mrs. Dearmer Beecham (Pills, Opera, Thomas) Ella
A. C. Benson Sydney Webb
British Academy Messrs. Chapell
Countess of Warwick George Edwards
Willie Ferraro Captain Cook R. J. Campbell
Clan Thesiger Martin Harvey William Archer
George Grossmith R. H. Benson
Annie Besant Chenil Clan Meynell
Father Vaughan Joseph Holbrooke Clan Strachey

(b)

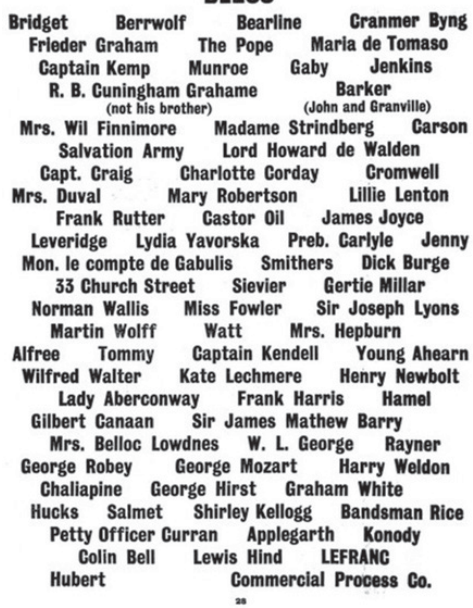

BLESS
Bridget Berrwolf Bearline Cranmer Byng
Frieder Graham The Pope Maria de Tomaso
Captain Kemp Munroe Gaby Jenkins
R. B. Cuningham Grahame (not his brother) Barker (John and Granville)
Mrs. Wil Finnimore Madame Strindberg Carson
Salvation Army Lord Howard de Walden
Capt. Craig Charlotte Corday Cromwell
Mrs. Duval Mary Robertson Lillie Lenton
Frank Rutter Castor Oil James Joyce
Leveridge Lydia Yavorska Preb. Carlyle Jenny
Mon. le compte de Gabulis Smithers Dick Burge
33 Church Street Sievier Gertie Millar
Norman Wallis Miss Fowler Sir Joseph Lyons
Martin Wolff Watt Mrs. Hepburn
Alfree Tommy Captain Kendell Young Ahearn
Wilfred Walter Kate Lechmere Henry Newbolt
Lady Aberconway Frank Harris Hamel
Gilbert Canaan Sir James Mathew Barry
Mrs. Belloc Lowdnes W. L. George Rayner
George Robey George Mozart Harry Weldon
Chaliapine George Hirst Graham White
Hucks Salmet Shirley Kellogg Bandsman Rice
Petty Officer Curran Applegarth Konody
Colin Bell Lewis Hind LEFRANC
Hubert Commercial Process Co.

Figure 1 Wyndham Lewis, "Blast" and "Bless." From *Blast*, Issue 1, June 20, 1914. By permission the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust, a registered charity. Photograph courtesy of the Modernist Journals Project, Brown University and University of Tulsa.

Lewis offers a modern variation on the old satiric theme of *laus et vituperatio*, or praise and blame.

Yet the shared moral standard – along with the stable meaning and the aim of punishment or reform – is only one side of satire. The canonical model has another component. In the prologue to Ben Jonson's play *Volpone*, the chorus explains the playwright's intentions: "In all his poems still hath been this measure, / To mix profit with your pleasure" (49). This combination of profit and pleasure was a central Renaissance formula for all literature, derived from Horace's dictum in *Ars Poetica* that poetry should mix the useful with the sweet ("*miscuit utile dulci*"). Indeed, from Horace's two functions of literature it is a short skip to John Dryden's influential discussion in his 1693 "Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire," and from there to Frye's two-pronged definition.[32] Comedy writer-turned-US Senator Al Franken put it plainly when he titled his 2005 book *The Truth (with Jokes)*. Despite the jokes, however, the moral purpose of satire remains primary; wit, humor, irony, parody, caricature, grotesquerie are merely satire's "methods" – sugar added to help the medicine go down. And because satire's overriding purpose has been seen as one of moral judgment or attack, the humor most closely affiliated with satire is that which Freud calls "tendentious": the targeted laughter of ridicule and mockery.

Revising the Canonical Model

The canonical model has many virtues. It shifted academic criticism of satire from what Fredric Bogel calls a "preformalist" historicism to literary analysis, and it gave critical shape and weight to what had been vague intuitions and assumptions (*DSM* 5). But over the last half-century, waves of literary theory have challenged and complicated the old consensus. Most crucially, scholars have become more skeptical about characterizing satire as a necessarily moral mode. Even if satire does exert judgment and rely on norms, not every norm is a moral one. Guy Fieri's restaurant may be awful, but can pretzel chicken tenders, no matter how grease-laden, be immoral? Satire may just as easily take aim at social or intellectual failings as ethical ones.[33] As Charles Knight points out, "ugliness, clumsiness, foolishness, bad taste, [and] stupidity" are generally not thought to be forms of immorality (*LS* 5). For Robert Hume, the critical shibboleth of a "high moral norm" has survived only because of intellectual inertia and cannot withstand a detailed examination "the nitty-gritty daily actualities" of satiric practice.[34] To be sure, some famous eighteenth-century satirists claimed moral motives: Pope said that satire "heals with Morals what it hurts with Wit" (262), Swift that he wrote "with a moral View designed / To cure the Vices of Mankind" (634).[35] But the

expression of moral purpose is often no more than a convenient theme, a cliché that offers an occasion for satiric observation or performance (*SCR* 37). P.K. Elkin noted back in 1973 that the moral justifications of early eighteenth-century satirists were often little more than "handy sticks with which to beat off their assailants."[36]

Even when a moral purpose can be discovered, this purpose rarely spurs reform. Swift's Lemuel Gulliver observes with mock surprise that his countrymen's behavior has failed to change despite the popularity of his *Travels*: "Behold, after above six months warning, I cannot learn that my book has produced one single effect according to my intentions." He continues:

> I desired you would let me know, by a letter, when party and faction were extinguished; judges learned and upright; pleaders honest and modest, with some tincture of common sense, and Smithfield blazing with pyramids of law books; the young nobility's education entirely changed; the physicians banished; the female *Yahoos* abounding in virtue, honour, truth, and good sense; courts and levees of great ministers thoroughly weeded and swept; wit, merit, and learning rewarded. (255)

Satire, despite its "plainly deducible" lessons, brings about no magical, instantaneous reform. Indeed, Swift observes elsewhere, readers have an uncanny ability to deflect satiric criticism away from themselves and onto others: "Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own" (95).

In Woody Allen's *Manhattan*, Ike Davis offers a slightly different reason for doubting satire's power. Having learned of an imminent neo-Nazi march, Ike proposes that he and some friends "get some bricks and baseball bats and really explain things to 'em." A woman instead suggests reading a "devastating satirical piece on that on the op-ed page of the *Times*," but Ike dismisses the vaunted power of satire:

IKE: Well, a satirical piece in the *Times* is one thing, but bricks and baseball bats really gets right to the point down there.
HELEN: Oh, but really biting satire is always better than physical force.
IKE: No, physical force is always better with Nazis . . . It's hard to satirize a guy with shiny boots on.[37]

Satiric commentary seems wholly inadequate in the face of the murderous hatred of neo-Nazis, just as it proves inadequate to the flood of corruption and vice that plagued Gulliver's England.